Letdown by botanicapoetica

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Summary:

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1. Chapter 1

Months had passed with no incident. They'd dropped the subject of Billy filing against his dad, Billy saying things were going better at home and not listening to a word Steve said, to the point that Steve was happy to drop it too. He should've been smarter about it, should've been persistent, but they were happy. Billy was unscathed for long stretches of time, was happy sneaking into Steve's window like Steve had done for so many girls, once upon a time. He should've known better. In the end, he just should've fucking known better.

Steve was cleaning up in preparation for his parents returning home the next day when he heard the crackle of the walkie talkie up in his room. He remembered the day Mike had given it to him in front of the other brats, holding it out to him solemnly, like they were partaking in some kind of holy ceremony. "Guard this with your life, and if you ever need us or we need you, it will be there." He remembers Dustin saying, and although Steve had wanted to make a wisecrack he was touched and did nothing but nod slowly and cradle the walkie talkie in his arms.

Steve is walking slowly upstairs to answer the signal when he hears a voice, lower than any he usually hears on this line. "Steve, it's Jim. Get down to the quarry, your boy is driving like a fucking crazy person and won't pull over for me. I shot his fucking back tire out and he won't stop, I'm gonna try to run him off near there. See you soon. Over." The sound of a motor revving sounded over the speaker for a moment before the line cut from Hopper's end.

Steve came to in the driver's seat of his car, speeding toward the quarry with no memory of grabbing his keys or leaving his house. When he arrived at the quarry he screeched to a halt, taking in the broken tail light of Billy's car and the matching dent on the front of Hopper's and the fact that neither of them were in said cars making his pulse jump. When he got out and ran up to them, it was like the last few months hadn't happened at all.

Billy was on his back, kicking wildly at the gravel beneath his feet, his wrists in Hopper's hold. He saw that Hopper was visibly holding back, which had to have been hard with what he was faced with.

Billy's face was covered in blood and he was screaming and snarling at Hopper, trying to spit in his face.

"I said FUCKING LOCK ME UP. LOCK ME UP OR SHOOT ME YOU FUCKING PUSSY." Billy screamed, his teeth bared up at the man above him, like it didn't matter that he was vastly overpowered. Hopper's jaw was set and he was clearly struggling not to hold on to Billy tighter, and his head turned at the sound of Steve's arrival. Billy seemed to pick up on this as well, horror flashing across his face before it turned into something else, something Steve had only seen laying on the floor of the Beyers' house.

"MotherFUCKER." was all Billy said before rearing back and slamming his head into Hopper's, following it with a sharp knee to the stomach that finally freed him. Steve would've been relieved, almost relieved, if Billy had been drunk, but he wasn't. Steve could see he was dead sober, eyes wild and wide in a way they hadn't been in so long. He stepped closer with his hands out in front of him, about to try to placate the other boy when he finally got a good look at him up close. "Billy, are you okay?"

Billy was leaning back against his car and with him standing it was clear something was wrong. His shirt was ripped at the neck and his left arm was hanging at an odd angle, the bone at the top of his shoulder creating a bump that shouldn't have been there. His face was pale under all the blood that was most likely caused by the large and numerous cuts decorating his cheeks and nose like road rash. There were no tears in sight, not that Steve could tell if that was a good or bad thing. He took another two steps forward before Billy gritted his teeth and forced both his arms out in front of him.

"Get the fuck away from me. Get away from me." Billy ground out, starting to shake when Steve ignored him and got closer, now standing about five feet away. Steve reached his own hands out but had them quickly slapped away and gave up for the moment. "Billy, what happened? What happened to you?" At this, Billy's anger surged up again and he was glaring, spitting blood at Steve's feet with a nasty look on his face.

"You fucking happened. You made me fucking sloppy. I said 'he'. I fucking said it, I dug my own fucking grave." Billy spat out, pushing

Steve back, but not as hard as he would've before. This didn't knock Steve down, it gave Billy space, though he didn't know what for until suddenly Billy was past him and dodging Hopper in an instant sprint. Hopper cursed and leaned against the trunk of Billy's car, but Steve still had it in him. He took off at a full run, hoping he could catch up to Billy who was running like there was a monster behind him.

Steve watched Billy trip and lose his footing for a moment and took the opportunity. He slammed into Billy's back on the side of his bad shoulder with some regret, despite knowing it was going to be the only way to get him down. A bark of pain and Billy was down, Steve wasting no time gripping Billy hard from behind, ignoring the pain of Billy's boots kicking back at his legs as he locked his fists together over the other boy's chest.

"Billy stop. Please, stop. Stop this now, it's alright. You're not gonna go back there." Steve said lowly against Billy's ear, a panicked sound answering him. Billy struggled again for a minute, groaning through his teeth in pain when Steve pressed too hard against his shoulder. "I don't have anywhere to go, Steve. I don't have anywhere to go, I don't have anywhere to go..." Billy started rambling, his pitch rising and wobbling each time, until the sound of Hopper coming up to them clammed him up.

"Let's get you checked out first, kid. Then we can decide what to do from there. There's time, you don't need to think about it right now. Come on, Steve, you can let go." Hopper said slowly, and Steve wondered if Hopper had ever had to see a hostage negotiation. Regardless it worked, and Billy didn't go anywhere at all when he finally let go of him. He didn't go anywhere at all for several long minutes.

When they finally hauled him up and into Hopper's car, he was silent. Steve could practically hear the gears turning wildly in Billy's head as he dreamt up the repercussions of this particular event. He knew it wasn't really his fault that it had happened, that Billy was afraid or that Neil was the way he was.

Maybe it was his fault. Maybe just a little.

2. Chapter 2

Notes for the Chapter:

Dialogue heavy, but it needs to be.

Steve has been sitting in the hallway of the hospital for four hours. Hour one was the sound of Billy screaming in pain when they reset his shoulder. Hour two was watching a metal cart full of stitching supplies roll past him into the room. Hour three was watching Hopper yell into the phone, his free hand twitching for a cigarette the entire time. Hour four is Hopper coming out with red eyes and sitting down next to him slowly, dragging his back down the wall.

"His dad broke his mirror. Dragged his face across it. Billy tried to run but his dad grabbed him. Yanked his arm right out of its socket." Hopper said, clipped and monotone. Hopper was always a support, someone to look to when shit was falling apart, but not right now. They'd both seen it, seen too much as a result, and Hopper looked haunted by something Steve couldn't possibly imagine. Or maybe he could, maybe they were thinking the same fucking thing.

"I dropped it, you know. I had been telling him over and over just-, to just file against Neil. He fought me on it every time, but I kept pushing it. Then suddenly a week went by and nothing had happened at home. Then another week, and that turned into a month. He said it had been going better at home, Hopper. He seemed so much better, like things were finally tapering off. I dropped the subject because I just wanted things to stay the way they were. I didn't want to rock the boat, I didn't want to upset him when he seemed so optimistic. And then things just kept being okay at home, and he didn't have any bruises and I checked, Hopper, I fucking checked every day. He was doing good, he was s-safe and…" Steve looked up and found his eyes on Hopper's uniform. He didn't know when his head had ended up there, when his face had gotten so hot and wet. Hopper's hands were heavy, solid on his back, holding him in place. He couldn't talk anymore, it felt like there were hands around his neck. He wondered how many times Billy had experienced that with real human hands.

"It's not that easy, kid. It's not. It's always more complicated than

that, you can't make someone get help. You didn't do anything wrong and you can't blame yourself." Hopper was saying into his hair, and Steve felt an all encompassing anger pass through him. Wondered if this is how Billy felt when his eyes lit up like they had at the quarry, all the outrage and exhaustion bleeding everywhere and on to everything he saw.

Steve shoved himself away from Hopper and stood abruptly, looking down at the man where he sat. "But I DO. I BLAME MYSELF AND I BLAME YOU. WE KNEW, WE SAW HOW BAD IT COULD GET AND WE DIDN'T DO ANYTHING. We just fucking sat on our hands and we didn't do ANYTHING. Billy being happy for a second doesn't mean you fucking stop trying to save him, nothing blowing up doesn't mean it fucking can't. We just did NOTHING. Like we were watching a fucking TV show, like it was something you could just ignore. Just turn the channel to something pleasant and forget what you fucking saw. Neil could've killed him, he could still fucking kill him-"

"Steve, he won't. Susan and Max are gonna come home from their trip to an empty house. Neil's being booked now, we're having an expedited emancipation hearing for Billy. He's not going back there, Steve. He's gonna come stay with me when they say he can leave. It's going to be okay, Steve. He's going to have somewhere to go, we still got him in time." Hopper interjected, but Steve didn't give a shit. He felt the floor drop out from under him, a devastating wave crashing over him. Steve took a solid step backwards.

"Did we? They had to pick glass out of his face, I had to hear him screaming for the nurse to stop popping his arm back in. Do you know how long this has been happening, Hopper? Twelve years. Billy says twelve years. After more than a decade isn't 'in time'. After watching him try drinking himself to death isn't 'in time'. After you told me he tried to body slam himself out of a moving car isn't 'in time'. I can't fucking stand this, I don't fucking deserve to be here." Steve said, his last sentence dawning on him at the same time it seemed to dawn on Hopper, as they both watched Steve take another few steps away from the hospital room door.

"Steve…" Hopper said, his shoulders set again as he stood himself up, talking to Steve like he was about to bolt. Steve heard the door open and knew Hopper was right. He started walking backwards, ignoring

Hopper's voice getting louder and more urgent. His head felt like static, the sound of his own blood rushing in his ears, as he saw Billy's eyes land on him from where he was laying down. His face was clean now and covered in stitches on the right side, and he watched the other boy's head lift to stare at Steve. He watched realization dawn on Billy's face, watched the light go out of his eyes as he put his head back down on the bed to stare at the ceiling, and Steve ran.

Author's Note:

botanicapoetica.tumblr.com is the spot